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ABSTRACT

The College Station (Texas) Independent School District spent several months improving its summer school programs, but the results have been well worth the effort. The district's first step was to create the new position of "summer school principal" at the elementary, junior high, and senior high levels. This action relieved school-year principals from summer school planning and allowed a few professionals to develop a quality program. The person hired as The elementary summer school principal was given the task of designing an effective, cost-efficient summer school program, and did so in collaboration with teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Staff were guided by a nine-step action plan involving: (1) cooperative planning; (2) developing a curriculum including both remedial and enrichment classes and field trips; (3) recruiting faculty; (4) scheduling hour-long classes for a half-day program; (5) publicizing the program; (6) registering students on a convenient Saturday and charging $25 minimum tuition; (7) streamlining program operations; (8) formatting an easily understood final report; and (9) involving teachers in program evaluation. Teachers and students benefitted from the lack of grades, the chance to build confidence and new friendships, discovery of ways to combine fun and learning, freedom from paperwork, and the short working day. (MLH)

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HERE'S HOW

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Nine Steps to a Successful Summer School

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Nancy Ann Thornberry

With the chill of winter still in the air, now is the perfect time to plan your summer school. A good summer school program takes a few weeks to put together, but an *excellent* program takes a few months. In the College Station Independent School District, we took the time, did the work, and we believe we have an excellent summer school program. It took months to put together, but the results have been well worth the effort.

Five years ago, College Station already had a good albeit limited program: one, two, or three teachers taught remedial reading and math to small groups of children from different grade levels at each of the four elementary schools in the district. However, the program was neither cost-effective nor cost-efficient.

New Job: "Summer School Principal"

The first step taken by the district board of education to improve the summer program was to create the new position of "summer school principal" at the elementary, junior high, and senior high levels. This action relieved regular school-year building principals from the burden of summer school planning and permitted a few professionals to spend all their time on the development of a quality summer program for the children of College Station.

I was hired to be the summer school principal at the elementary school level. My task was to design an effective pre-K–6 summer school program. Fortunately I had the enthusiastic assistance of many teachers, administrators, students, and parents, and together we were able to produce an excellent, cost-efficient summer school program.

We were guided by an overall nine-step action plan. The very first step was itself a call for cooperative and collaborative planning. We followed that with steps 2) developing a curriculum, 3) recruiting faculty, 4) scheduling, 5) public relations, 6) registration and tuition, 7) the actual operation of the summer school, 8) the writing of final reports at the end of the summer session, and 9) program evaluation.

Nancy Ann Thornberry was College Station's first districtwide elementary summer school principal. On November 1, however, Ms. Thornberry became the PK-12 Language Arts Social Studies Fine Arts Coordinator for the College Station Independent School District. She also now supervises all summer school principals.

Step One: Planning

Working fulltime on the program, I was able to focus the thoughts of many people upon the requirements of an overall plan. It had essentially two parts: a *mission statement* (why we need a summer school and what it ought to accomplish) and an *action timeline* (what should be done and when).

The mission statement indicated that we would provide assistance to children with deficiencies in reading, math, and writing. In addition, we would provide a variety of enrichment classes and educational excursions in order to broaden children's knowledge in special areas of interest and to extend learning in a meaningful way during the summer months.

Our timeline laid out the expected sequence of events. For example, pinning down the dates to open and end the program and establish the times for class sessions; deciding on tuition, fees, and other budgetary matters; outlining the procedures for teacher recruitment and selection; and making decisions regarding curriculum, registration, and program evaluation.

This two-part master plan allowed us to pursue all elements in a timely fash-

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ion, but without losing sight of any single element or of the overall goal of an excellent summer school program for our students.

Step Two: Curriculum Development

An elementary school's most important responsibility is to teach children the basic skills in reading, math, and writing. Therefore, remedial classes remained in the summer school curriculum. We addressed the skill deficiencies of each child by providing individualized instruction in small classes of eight to twelve students. (These classes also satisy our state requirements to provide remediation for children who do not master all or part of the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills, or TEAMS.)

However, the greater half of the curriculum included enrichment classes in virtually all academic areas. While a few classes were designed for children from a single grade level, most classes used cluster groups of children from several grades.

We offered enrichment classes in literature, study skills, and creative writing; math, science, and the computer; creative arts, theater arts, stringed instruments, and rhythmic activities; and social studies, language development, and Spanish. Within these basic offerings, many sub-classes were also created. For example, the literature classes included Fun with Fairy Tales; Monsters, Mysteries, and Mythology; Literature and Puppetry; E. B. White, Bloom's, and Books; Choral Reading, Fingerplays, and Poetry; and Children's Literature.

Plus Field Trips

Finally, for additional enrichment, we added field trips and educational excursions to the curriculum. Destinations have included a zoo, area parks, a planetarium, a space center, and many other similar public facilities. For our second summer session, we planned four excursions on chartered buses to occur during the month immediately following the regular summer program. However, during the most recent summer session, we offered six afternoon field trips to help extend concepts taught in morning science and social studies classes.

The result has been a lively, student-centered curriculum offered within a creative and happy atmosphere for learning, both in and outside the classroom.

Step Three: Recruiting Faculty

Once we established the curriculum, we began to recruit faculty. In addition to basic qualifications, we gave priority to teachers of previous summer schools, teachers currently employed within the district, and teachers uniquely qualified to teach one or another subject.

One of the best ways of ensuring a successful summer school is to assign people to teach subjects for which they indicate a special interest or preference or in which they have special expertise. Hence, we devised a simple application form in which the teachers themselves ranked or checked all areas of preference or special interest.

At the outset, many teachers were hesitant to join our new program, but in subsequent years, as the school's reputation has grown, so has the pile of teacher applications. As principal, I've been able to be selective in recruiting; hence, faculty quality has increased significantly since our first summer of operation.

Step Four: Scheduling

Our summer classes were each one hour long and were conducted between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. The master schedule offered classes for each grade level as well as a variety of classes in different academic areas at every hour. This kind of checkerboard scheduling helped alleviate the problem of some classes not attracting the minimum number of sign-ups (8).

We've found that a half-day program for four weeks is the most satisfactory arrangement for summer school. Teachers like the extra employment and income, yet still have enough freedom and time to pursue other vacation interests during the summer. Parents and students also favor the arrangement, since afternoons are left free for other activities, and enough vacation time is still available in the remaining summer months.

Step Five: Public Relations

One of the most critical steps in creating a new program is to inform the public. At College Station we did this through newspaper and television announcements; the publication and wide distribution of a detailed summer school brochure; teacher support in the classroom during the spring; and communication with parent and teacher organizations and community groups.

After one year of operation, the school's future success was assured by its reputation, known mainly by "word of mouth," another and very important resource in public relations.

Step Six: Registration and Tuition

We decided to have registration take place on a Saturday morning approximately six weeks prior to the first day of summer school. This choice seemed to be most fair for working parents, since class enrollments had to be limited and students were to be assigned on a first come, first served basis.

Initially we registered students at each elementary school for at least two to three days per week until the end of the regular school year. Registration during the week prior to the first day of summer school is essential, since many parents delay registration until they receive their children's final test scores or report cards. This year, since five elementary schools are involved, our current plans call for registration at just one central location. This ought to take the burden off each school office as well as insure greater accuracy and consistency in the process.

Minimum Tuition: $25

The tuition collected during registration is the primary source of summer school support. Tuition for each remedial class has been $25; each enrichment class, $35; each field trip, $28; and each excursion, between $18 and $38. Out-of-district students have paid an additional total fee of $25. Other support has been minimal; some from

COLLEGE STATION SUMMER SCHOOL AT-A-GLANCE

	1986	1987	1988	1989
TOTAL ENROLLMENT	275	377	488	476
ENROLLMENTS (BY CLASSES):				
Remedial	136 (17)	137 (12)	154 (15)	159 (17)
Enrichment	302 (21)	526 (42)	685 (73)	791 (73)
Excursions	0	137 (4)	168 (6)	128 (5)
Field Trips	0	0	0	26 (1)
TOTAL	438 (38)	800 (58)	1,007 (94)	1,104 (96)
FACULTY & STAFF:	18	26	41	44
SALARIES (Principals, Teachers, Office Staff, Aides)	$12,548	$17,186	$26,230	$27,671
TEACHING SUPPLIES (Consumable)	$305	$820	$719	$1,059
BROCHURE PRINTING	$185	$129	$454	$567
XEROX EXPENSES	$112	$25	$45	$75
EXCURSION EXPENSES	—	$4,087	$5,878	$5,773
Salaries	—	$1,481	$1,883	$1,700
Charter Bus Rental	—	$1,781	$2,438	$2,734
T-shirts	—	$664	$1,087	$782
Admission Fees	—	$47	$303	$417
Snacks, Drinks, Supplies	—	$114	$167	$140
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$13,150	$22,247	$33,326	$35,145
TOTAL BUDGET	$15,009	$22,440	$34,850	$38,421
Tuition	$13,021	$21,640	$32,375	$35,966
From the District	$1,250	$300	$1,800	$1,900
From the State	$738	$500	$675	$555
REMAINING FUNDS	+ $1,859	+ $193	+ $1,524	+ $3,276

(NOTE: All totals rounded to nearest dollar.)

the state for TEAMS-related remediation and some from the district for certain expenses such as my salary as principal.

Step Seven: Operation

Our summer school has operated smoothly, and I think this can be traced to these small but nevertheless important factors:

- Our summer school campus is centrally located. Young children can go from class to class with a minimum of confusion, stress, and lost time.
- We reprinted campus maps in the school brochure, posted them throughout the school, and made sure the children knew how to use them.
- We used parents and students from nearby universities as teacher assistants wherever possible.
- Progress reports were given only in remedial classes.
- Before each field trip or educational excursion, we made sure that parents received a full description and a detailed itinerary, and that they had signed the required permission slips.
- Each child who went on one or more field trips received a specially designed T-shirt (at no extra charge) to wear in order to be easily identified by the accompanying teachers.
- But most of all we tried to engender a relaxed and friendly atmosphere throughout the school. For example, we had an open house for parents, a breakfast and a luncheon for our faculty, and special fun-filled Fridays for all our students.

Step Eight: Final Report

At the end of each summer term we prepared a formal final report to the administration and board of education of the College Station Independent School District. In that report we reviewed our income (tuition, plus state and district assistance) and our expenditures (supplies, teacher salaries, printing, etc.).

We formatted this report so that it could be easily understood by others and used as their guide for planning summer school programs in subsequent years. We also indicated those curriculum areas that might be expanded.

Step Nine: Program Evaluation

Finally, we conducted an evaluation of our program in order to identify those areas in which we could refine and improve the quality of summer school. Each year we asked our teachers to complete an evaluation form, indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the program as they saw them, suggest what might be changed and what might be kept as is, and make any other rec-

ommendations they think might be appropriate.

What the Teachers Say

Here are some of the things our teachers have told us over the past four years:

1. Since there were no grades, the atmosphere was less stressful and more relaxed, offering more opportunities for creativity, individualized instruction, and the sharing of thoughts. As a result, the children exhibited a more positive attitude toward school.

2. Summer school helped build confidence and new friendships.

3. Children and teachers discovered they could combine fun with learning in many activities.

4. Teachers enjoyed the freedom from heavy paperwork, formal evaluations, and constant recordkeeping.

5. Teachers welcomed the short working day and gained new experiences and ideas from other colleagues throughout the district.

The majority of suggestions and comments from teachers were positive, pertinent, and have been incorporated into the program wherever and whenever possible.

In addition to the summer school faculty, we solicited regular building principals, parents, and students for input in the final evaluation. The result from this evaluation process has been the development of policies and practices that ensure a quality summer program.

Four Years of Results

The experiences of the past four years have been gratifying. Because our program plan was good and we followed it, the program results have been good as well. Each year we've had substantial enrollment increases and faculty growth, matched by the availability of many new classes, educational excursions, and field trips. We've made adjustments and refinements, based on the evaluations and our experiences year-by-year.

All these improvements have contributed significantly to the success and popularity of the program in the College Station community. Furthermore, our model is being replicated in neighboring school districts.

A top-notch summer school program for elementary level children is a tremendous challenge, but it can be achieved with effective leadership, organization, and an unyielding commitment to excellence. But perhaps the most reliable barometer of the program's success are the children who can hardly wait to come to summer school each day!

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